CHAPTER-II

LEWIS' ROMANTICISM

Romanticism deserves special attention in Lewis' criticism as he responded to literature essentially as a romantic. Romanticism was something ingrained in him and it began to manifest itself quite early in his childhood. Lewis observes in his autobiography, Suppressed by Joy, "My earliest aesthetic experiences, if they were aesthetic ... were already incurably romantic ..."¹ Among his early aesthetic experiences, two were crucial in his life as a writer because they awakened in him the love of natural beauty and also initiated him into Sehnsucht or longing which played a central role in his romanticism.

Once in those very early days my brother brought into the nursery the lid of a biscuit tin which he had covered with moss and garnished with twigs and flowers so as to make it a toy garden or a toy forest. That was the first beauty I ever knew. What the real garden had failed to do, the toy garden did. It made me aware of nature - not, indeed, as a storehouse of forms and colours but as something cool, dewy, fresh, exuberant. I do not think the impression was very important at the moment, but it soon became important in memory. As long as I live my imagination of Paradise will retain something of my brother's toy garden. "And every day there were what we called "the Green Hills"; that is, the low line of the Castlereagh Hills which we saw from the nursery windows. They were not very far off but they are, to children, quite
Sehnsucht is an intense kind of longing and it is usually triggered by seeing a beautiful object of nature or by hearing a certain sound or by reading a romantic tale. It is ... that unnameable something, desire for which pierces us like a rapier at the smell of a bonfire, the sound of wild ducks flying overhead, the title of The Well at the World's End the opening lines of "Kubla Khan", the morning cobwebs in late summer, or the noise of falling waves?

It also can be triggered by recalling a happy memory:

As I stand beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me...

In Sehnsucht, the longing is so acute that it borders on pain, yet the longing itself is a delight. "The hunger is better than any other fulness; this poverty better than all other wealth". It is a bitter-sweet desire, and "cuts across our ordinary distinction between wanting and having. To have it is, by definition, a want; to want, we find, it is to have it." Secondly, there is something mysterious about the object of the desire. The inexperienced people feel that they know what they desire and are completely deceived by false

unattainable. They taught me longing — Sehnsucht; made me for good or ill, and before I was six years old, a votary of the Blue Flower.

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desires. For instance, a child looking at a distant hillside may feel that he will fulfil his desire when he reaches there. But when he reaches the hillside he will get either nothing or a recurrence of the same desire. It is equally illusive when the object of the desire is a happy memory or remembered joy, the existence of an enchanted place described in a tale, a perfect beloved. Even if you are granted all these wishes, "the Sweet Desire would have disappeared; would have shifted its ground, like the cuckoo's voice or the rainbows end, and be now calling us from beyond a further hill".5

Thus the call is, tantalizing, mysterious and unattainable. This call is the call of the imagined ideal and the search for it is the romantic quest for the imagined ideal.6 That ideal whatever form it assumes - whether it is a perfect beloved, an ideal vacation or a distant hill always proves elusive.7 The call has another level of meaning. Lewis is a Neoplatonist and in Neoplatonism a number of things have double existence. Ideas or universals which exist in the mind of the Infinite can also exist in the finite mind of the artist. That is why it is possible to reflect the universals in the particulars of art. Besides, Lewis also believes that a universal spirit exists and that he has this spirit within him. "... I do believe that I have in me a spirit, a chip, shall we say, of universal spirit, and that since all good
and joyful things are spiritual and non-material, I must be careful not to let matter (=nature=Satan, remember) get too great a hold on me, and dull the one spark I have.8 His perception of beauty has the same pattern. For where he looks at a beautiful sight he sees not only beauty but finds that behind the veil of sensuous beauty which gives the temporary thrills, another force actively operates inviting him to further mystery, "... beauty seems to me to be always an invitation of some sort; usually an invitation to we don't know what. A wood seen as 'picturesque' by a fool (who'd like a frame around it) may be purely contemplated: seen as 'beautiful' it seems rather to say "come unto me"9 because beauty is the call of the spirit.

You see the conviction gaining ground on me after all spirit does exist; and that we come into contact with the spiritual element by means of these 'thrills'. I fancy that there is something right outside time and place, which did not create matter, as the Christians say, but is matter's great enemy: and the Beauty is the call of the spirit in that something to the spirit in us.10

Thus beauty is not only the call of the romantic ideal but also the call of the spirit from the eternal realm. After his return to Christianity, it dawned upon him that Sehnsucht was the beginning of joy in the Christian sense and in fact it was really the desire for union with God. He also realised that as every human desire has a purpose, this mystical longing also has an ultimate purpose.
Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were not meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.11

The real thing is our true home, and the desire or Sehnsucht aroused in us is only a foretaste of it to remind us of our real destiny as human beings. "Corbin Scott Cornell personifies Sehnsucht as the 'hound of Heaven, relentlessly pursuing man in order that he may discover his true identity and home". The final fulfilment of Sehnsucht is portrayed beautifully in The Last Battle where the Narnian unicorn shouts with joy".12

I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.13

The Sehnsucht motif is central to Lewis' romanticism, and though it figures most prominently in The Pilgrim's Regress and Surprised by Joy it "can be identified in nearly all his works".14

In one's discussion on Sehnsucht, a clear pattern emerges concerning Lewis' romanticism: the predominance of
Neoplatonism and Christian mysticism. In the beginning it was almost pure Neoplatonism and after his conversion to Christianity, Neoplatonism and mysticism merged. But his romantic self remained unchanged, and his mode of perception of transcendental realities remained the same. Like other Romantics he was concerned with how those realities are revealed and perceived. According to him they are revealed in the form of knowledge and they are perceived by the two mental faculties of reason and imagination. Like Plato and Aristotle, Lewis draws a distinction between two forms of knowledge: **savoir** and **connaître**. **Savoir** is knowledge about Reality acquired through the use of logic and reason. But in contrast **connaître** is experiential knowledge of Reality acquired through imagination. These two faculties are complementary and they re-enforce one another: reason abstracts things and imagination concretizes them and makes them more susceptible to sensuous experience. Lewis views are further elaborated by Michael Christensen as follows:

> Reason and imagination for Lewis are the complementary human faculties for knowing. In the realm of facts, empirical evidence, sense objects, particulars, and so on, truth is known through reason. But transcendent Reality — knowledge of universals in the eternal realm — if it is to be known at all, must be grasped by imagination ... while reason perceives the truth or falsity of particulars, imagination apprehends universals (though never in an absolute way). What is conveyed through imagination, Lewis says,
'is not truth but reality', carefully distinguishing between the two: 'Truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is. Reality then is concrete and absolute, while truth is abstract and approximate ... The imaginative approach to reality is the nineteenth-century romantic affirmation of intuition over discursive reason, feeling over intellect, and the heart over the head, as the primary faculty of knowing. Imagination serves to grasp the essence of reality, intuit the immaterial universals, and embrace meaningful images - images which then become the tool of reason. But without the prior work of the imagination, reasoning itself is impossible.15

Thus, for Lewis though reason and imagination are complementary faculties, imagination plays the primary role. Reason can understand things of the factual and empirical realm but only imagination can grasp the spiritual or external realm of universals. Reason can grasp truth but only through imagination reality can be experienced, and only after it has grasped the essence of reality and intuited the immaterial universe reason can set to work and make meaningful images out of it. While science and philosophy are concerned with abstract, descriptive knowledge of the cosmos, religion is concerned with who man is in relation to who God is, with what is Beautiful, Just and Good. Knowledge of the universals requires divine acquaintance, "some 'tasting' of Love Himself". "A 'baptized imagination' as Lewis termed the romantic, mystical, intuitive sense, is necessary to obtain essential knowledge of the Ultimate."16
Lewis is advocating here the use of not merely imagination to understand the ultimate as the other Romantics would usually do but a "baptized imagination". This is understandable in the light of his conversion which had made a profound and radical impact on his attitude towards life and beyond. So in a way the "baptism" was not just a baptism of the imagination but it was also extended to his other aesthetics as well; and thus his romanticism itself acquired a new dimension. Once Lewis described his friend Charles Williams as a "Christian Romantic" and defined the term as follows:

A romantic theologian does not mean one who is romantic about theology, but one who is theological about romance, one who considers the theological implications of those experiences which are called romantic. The belief that the most serious and ecstatic experiences either of human love or of imaginative literature have such theological implications, and that they can be healthy and fruitful only if the implications are diligently thought out and severely lived, is the root principle of all his work.17

As Michael Christensen has suggested in his book, C.S. Lewis on Scripture, the term "Christian romantic" can be a fairly descriptive term for Lewis as well, as he has made serious and successful attempts in his works particularly in his romances like Out of the Silent Planet, Peredendra, That Hideous Strength to embody or convey theological
implications or truths. But this is not all. His new Christian approach was directed to his literary theories as well which find expression in books like Of This and Other Worlds and Christian Reflections.

In his essay, "Christianity and Literature" which is one of the essays in Christian Reflections, Lewis deals with the questions of imitation and originality and asks whether a Christian writer can be original. He traces the chain of hierarchical order in the epistles and also the gospel. In his epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul says, we are 'of Christ and Christ is of God (2:23). Again in the gospel of St. John, Our Lord compares the relation of the Father to the Son with that of the Son to his flock in respect of knowledge (10:15) and of love (15:9). This is not just a passive and inoperative hierarchical order but it is a matter to be reflected or imitated in life as Christ is to be formed inside each believer (Gal.4:19) or again Christians are told to imitate Paul as he in turn imitates Christ (1 Cor.11:1).

So from this Lewis draws the following conclusion:

In the New Testament the art of life itself is an art of imitation. Can we, believing this, believe that literature, which must derive from real life, is to aim at being 'creative' in 'original', and 'spontaneous'? Originality in the New Testament is quite plainly the prerogative of God alone; ... the duty and happiness of every other being is placed in being derivative, in reflecting like a mirror. Nothing would be more foreign to the tone of scripture than the
language of those who describe a saint as a 'moral genius' or a 'spiritual genius' thus insinuating that his virtue or spirituality is 'creative' or 'original'.

Therefore, Lewis is of the opinion that in the New Testament there is not much room for creativeness in any sense, literal or metaphorical. Because our destiny lies in the other direction: to humble ourselves and to be as little as possible, to be a mirror to reflect a face that is not ours, and to be a fragrance which is borrowed and not our own. But of course, he is not supporting the doctrine of depravity but only affirming that "the highest good of a creature must be creaturely — that is derivative or reflective — good. In other words, as St. Augustine makes plain (De Civ Dei 13, Cap.1) pride does not only go before a fall but is a fall — a fall of the creature's attention from what is better, God, to what is worse, itself."

Lewis applies the same principle of reflective and derivation to literature as well and says it should form the basis of all critical theory. But now a question arises as to whether imitation and originality in the modern critical sense can go together. Because if a Christian's good consists in being creaturely by imitating beauty or wisdom not of his own there seems to be no room left at all for originality to operate in his art, and lack of originality means lack of genuine creativity and any work lacking in it is considered
worthless. Lewis probes this question further in his essay and finds that in one sense a Christian can be genuinely creative and also original.

I spoke just now of the ancient idea that the poet was merely the servant of some god, of Apollo, or the Muse; but let us not forget the highly paradoxical words in which Homer's Phemus asserts his claim to be a poet — 'I am self-taught; a god has inspired me with all manner of songs'. It sounds like a direct contradiction. How can he be self-taught if the god has taught him all he knows? Doubtless because the god's instruction is given internally, contrasted with such external aids as, say, the example of other poets. And this seems to blur the distinction I am trying to draw between Christian imitation and 'originality' praised by modern critics. Phemus obviously claims to be original, in the same breath admits his complete dependence on a supernatural teacher. Does not this let in 'originality' and 'creativity' of the only kind that have ever been claimed?

Thus a Christian writer also can be both self-taught and original. He can be self-taught in the sense that the inspiration received is internal and can be treated as a part of the self, and he can be original in the sense that he does not follow the example of his predecessors.

Lewis makes yet one more distinction between the originality of a Christian and an unbelieving poet. Both of them can be equally original in the sense that they are not influenced by the example of their predecessors but have
drawn on resources of their own. But their resources can vary greatly because of their differences in attitude towards self.

The unbeliever may take his own temperament and experience, just as they happen to stand, and consider them worth communicating simply because they are facts or, worse still, because they are his to the Christian his own temperament and experience, as mere fact, and as merely his, are of no value or importance whatsoever: he will deal with them, if at all, only because they are the medium through which, or the position from which, something universally profitable appeared to him.21

Then Lewis gives the examples of Rousseau and St. Augustine both of whom wrote confessions. For the former his own temperament is absolute. But for the latter it is a humble appeal to the Lord to come to his aid and rebuild his wretched self which is in ruin. Wordsworth who is a romantic and who has one foot in each world writes about himself in both the manners of the unbeliever and a Christian. On the one hand he writes about himself and says:

[For] I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink Deep, and aloft ascending breathe in the world To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.22

On the other he craves indulgence if

I mix more lowly matter; with the thing Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man Contemplating; and who and what he was - This vision.23
Even in the sense of what Wordsworth writes, a Christian can be self-taught and original because his work is based on "the transitory being, that is he, not because he thinks it valuable for he knows that in his flesh dwells no good thing but only because of the 'vision' that appeared to it." But a Christian writer should guard himself against one thing – whether it is an idea or a method – he should not ask "Is it mine?" but "Is it good?" But this is not to suggest that a person should give preference to write only about himself. In fact, he should do it only if it is the thing he can do best. But if he has enough talents to produce work in "an established form and dealing with experiences common to all his race" he should do it more gladly. Because it is a point of weakness rather than strength if a person can respond to a vision only his own way.

We have heard Lewis' view on the difference of temperament between a pagan and a Christian poet. Next we shall look into his view on the difference between an existentialist and a true poet. Michael Christensen has explained Lewis' views as follows:

The true poet, in Lewis' view, is fundamentally neo-Platonic in outlook. In acknowledging a higher plane of reality, he naturally approaches literature differently from the existentialist poet who affirms only what is real and meaningful to him. The latter aims to express himself through his art. the former seeks to embody universal realities. The existentialist literary
critic values creativity and originality in art form. The neo-Platonic critic values external reality and concrete experiences portrayed in a beautiful way. The existentialist or 'modern' approach to literature is concerned with "art for art's sake". The Platonic or 'classical' approach is concerned with art for truth's sake. The existentialist or 'modern' approach to literature is concerned with "art for art's sake". The Platonic or 'classical' approach is concerned with art for truth's sake.

Then Christensen goes on to comment that Lewis' classical understanding of the function of art is nowhere better portrayed than in The Great Divorce. In the book there is a scene about an artist who has just reached the outskirts of heaven from hell travelling by bus along with other tourists. As soon as he sees the majestic beauty of heaven he wants to paint it immediately. But his guide, the spirit, suggests that he look rather than paint. The artist is perplexed. So the Spirit tries to explain:

When you painted on earth — at least in your earlier days — it was because you caught glimpses of Heaven in the landscape. The success of your painting was that it enabled others to see the glimpses too. But here you are having the thing itself. It is from here that the messages came. There is no good telling us about this country, for we see it already.

The scene depicts beautifully a modern tendency to be obsessed with self-expression. "The artist was no longer interested in the embodiment of eternal Beauty in terms of his art, but rather in self-expression." The Spirit perceptively remarks: 'Every poet and musician and artist,
but for Grace, is drawn away from the love of the thing he
tells, to love of the telling." 28

There are three other concepts that deserve our
attention as they figure prominently in Lewis' romantic
aesthetics, sentiment and homeliness and remember joy. We
shall first discuss sentiment. Lewis had an overabundance of
sentiment or feeling in him. He was "as intensely romantic as
a young nineteenth century poet, so romantic that at times he
feared his feeling would lead him to madness." 29 Feeling was
most powerfully aroused by beauty in nature and marvellous
literature as both evoked in him Sehnsucht. But
paradoxically, he also had developed a natural distrust of
sentiment, as a consequence, perhaps, of seeing frequently,
the unpredictability, unreliability and unpleasantness of his
father's emotional outbursts at home. Besides, he had a very
rational mind and to such a mind sentiment is a nuisance and
an embarrassment. But with the instinct of a true artist he
continued to uphold the role of feeling in aesthetic
creations where it can give delight. On the role of feeling
he wrote to Arthur Greeves:

I am perhaps more sentimental than you,
but I don't blow a trumpet about it.
Indeed, I am rather ashamed of it.
Feeling ought to be kept for literature
and art where they are delightful and not
intruded into life where they are merely
a nuisance". 30
Lewis also has made interesting observations in another letter to Greeves about feeling in painting, poetry and music. He says painting can express only visible beauty and poetry can express only conscious feeling which can be analysed but there are hundred of feelings that cannot be put into words or even thoughts. But music can begin where the other two leave off as moods and feelings that cannot be expressed in them can come out in music. Yet something even more unique about music is that it can express pure feeling and this kind of music can be found in the works of Schubert and Beethoven. So he considers music as the highest form of art.31

The next concept to be discussed is homeliness. It is considered by Lewis as one of the desired qualities in a work of art as this statement indicates: "... trying to think of some subject at once romantic, voluptuous and homely".32 But what is the meaning of homeliness in the way Lewis uses it? Although Lewis never defined 'homeliness' the word appears frequently in his letters and it indicates a sense of settled domesticity.33 Yet the longing is not specifically for a particular place but for a particular atmosphere that goes with idealised settled domesticity. "Homeliness in this sense is physically unattainable in this world but nevertheless a potent, mysterious yet compelling force whose call constitutes at least a species of that joy which Lewis was
later to designate as the centre of his life." It is also a part of "the search conducted by all romantics for the ineffable child and for the holy and innocent place."

After his return to the Christian faith it became easier for him to link homeliness with transcendental longing. So he grasped the idea immediately when his friend Owen Barfield described to him the spiritual world as home during a conversation.

He said among other things that he thought the idea of the spiritual world as home — the discovery of homeliness in that which is otherwise so remote — the feeling that you are coming back tho’ to a place you have never yet reached — was peculiar to the British, and thought that MacDonald, Chesterton, and I, had this more than anyone else.

Among the works of Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* embodies best the above statement. John, the hero’s journey back to the Christian faith is like returning home to discover homeliness with its feeling of acceptance, security, peace and joy. Thus something which was formerly only a vague, mysterious pagan aestheticism was transformed into a Christian theory of art which found expression in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, *The Dawn Treader* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and all these works give us a flavour of the homeliness.

Then finally, we shall look into what Lewis says about "remembered joy". It is related to both Sehnsucht and his
theory of beauty. It is related to Sehnsucht because a beautiful sight reminds him of other beautiful sights seen in the past which in turn triggers longing. It is also related to his theory of beauty because he considers "remembered joy" as a condition of beauty.

To me, it seems that a great many emotions are united in the perception of beauty: it may turn out to be not a simple thing but a result of unions. For one thing nearly all beautiful sights are to me chiefly important reminders of other beautiful sights: without memory it could be a poor affair. The process presumably has a beginning but once going it grows like a snowball. Could it be that joy remembered ("which now is sad because it has been sweet") is a necessary element in beauty? There is too, I think, a purely sensuous element: that such and such notes and tints (in themselves — not in their combinations) just happen to satisfy our nerves of hearing and sight — as certain food satisfy those of tastes. This would be rather a condition of beauty, perhaps, than an element in it.37

"Joy remembered" is a keynote in Lewis’ theory of beauty, as he has described above, and it generates a chain of reactions "accumulating in intensity as it increases its scope through time".38 It is also an important element of Sehnsucht and Lewis has given a concrete example in the scene of the current bush in which while he was looking at the bush it suddenly flashed in his mind the memory of his brother’s garden which in turn brought Sehnsucht. This type of event convinces Lewis that there is
no such thing as pure contemplation of beauty or cold aesthetics. Because in the perception of beauty many emotions are involved and you get the total impact of beauty from their union and not separately. But one special characteristic to be remembered about "joy remembered" is that it cannot be called at will as the memory of every beautiful sight seen in the past does not bring or produce ecstasy. It has to come on its own and in a sudden flash of memory. "Remembered joy" can lead to creativity as "the impulse to create beauty stems from a desire to reproduce 'notes and tints', sensuous experiences which through memory and associations have taken on particular meaning for the artist and which have drawn him towards a central mystery, a beauty which cannot perhaps be fathomed". 39

So far, we have discussed Lewis' theories on Sehnsucht remembered joy, sentiment and homeliness. We also have pointed out the predominance of Neoplatonism and Christian mysticism in Lewis' romanticism. Neoplatonism is predominant because of his belief in the existence of two realms — the material realm and the spiritual or eternal realm; and the existence of the universals in the eternal realm which are reflected in the particulars of art. Next we have discussed the question of imitation and originality. Lewis continues to believe even after his conversion to Christianity that beauty is a reflection of the eternal beauty or wisdom and that an
artist does not create new beauty but simply imitates what is already in existence in the mind of the eternal Wisdom. But he also admits that a Christian writer can be both inspired and original because inspiration is an internal phenomenon. Lewis also compares a pagan and a Christian writer. The difference is that for a pagan his own temperament is absolute whereas for a Christian his temperament has value only because a vision of universal importance appeared to it. Lastly, he compares a true poet and an existentialist poet. An existentialist writes poetry only for self-expression. So for him art is for art's sake whereas for a true poet (a Neoplatonist) he writes poetry which embody universal truths and thus for him art is for truth's sake. Thus Lewis' aestheticism is a progression from an intuitive love of nature to Sehnsucht and from Sehnsucht to Neoplatonism and from Neoplatonism to Christian mysticism and from there to Christian romantic theories.